

Wrestling's building feud

The rivalry between the nation's two largest wrestling companies — WWF and WCW — should be heating up over the next few months. This time, the battleground will be the legal question of exclusivity in booking municipal arenas.

Exclusive promotional rights have existed at major arenas probably as long as there has been wrestling.

As Vince McMahon's World Wrestling Federation began expanding in the mid-'80s, his opposition found it difficult to book several of the major arenas in the Northeast. At the same time, some buildings in other parts of the country that drew big crowds for regional promoters initially refused to rent to the WWF. As the regional groups started drying up and the WWF became established by drawing big crowds in new markets, McMahon established a policy wherever possible of not booking into a building on a regular basis unless WWF had exclusivity.

Earlier this year, the WWF pulled out of the Meadowlands Arena in East Rutherford, N.J. Many have viewed this as a strategic withdrawal. Rival World Championship Wrestling now has regular dates at the Meadowlands, averaging about 5,400 per show, with each show drawing a smaller crowd than the previous one. The WWF averaged about 9,000 in the same arena. If the WCW isn't able to draw acceptable crowds, the Meadowlands management will likely ask the WWF back, which would spell the end of WCW in a major arena in the New York market.

The WWF stands to gross around \$30 million from arena ticket sales in 1991, plus \$8 million in souvenir sales — each figure about five times that grossed by WCW. This dominance has given the WWF leverage to keep WCW out of many of the country's nicest arenas — and in other cases, out of major markets completely. WCW has challenged the legality of exclusive building contracts in municipally owned arenas, targeting for legal action approximately two dozen arenas in which it has been unable to obtain dates. But the buildings are getting the squeeze from both sides: The WWF has threatened to pull out of arenas that succumb to WCW's pressure.

The early markets in this newest set of battles are St. Louis and the Bay Area.

St. Louis is a unique situation because the traditional home of WCW wrestling, Kiel Auditorium, was closed down May 1 — leaving The Arena as the market's only major indoor facility. When that building succumbed to pressure and gave WCW a June 14 date, the WWF responded by canceling all its shows there after Sunday.

The Oakland Coliseum Arena, a WWF-only facility for several years, gave WCW a July 27 show, and while the WWF hasn't pulled out, it did schedule a competing show for the previous night at San Francisco's Cow Palace.



**NO
HOLDS
BARRED**

BY DAVE MELTZER
FOR THE NATIONAL

ETC: Headed to the WWF are Wayne Bloom, Mike Enos and Mexican star Konnan. . . . New to WCW are P.N. News (Paul New), a 403-pounder who does a rap-music gimmick, The Diamond Stud (Scott Hall) and 1990 rookie of the year Steve Austin.

Chad

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